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President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 44 *(continued)*

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/54/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/457)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44, A/54/L.45)

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a pleasure to thank Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his report and for his tireless efforts, along with the members of the Committee, in informing the international community about the question of Palestine and the challenges that have been posed by successive Israeli Governments.

Although half a century has elapsed since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) in 1947 — which partitioned Palestine into two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish — and despite the fact that for many decades the United Nations has shown keen interest in dealing with the various Israeli policies that have prevented the establishment of a Palestinian State, and despite all the international efforts, we now regrettably face yet another challenge, due to the refusal of the Israeli Government to implement the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

Beginning with the Madrid Peace Conference, the United Arab Emirates has with keen interest followed the peace process, including the series of successive agreements that have been concluded between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, the latest being the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of last September. The United Arab Emirates considers that all the measures that have been taken to date by successive Israeli Governments in the context of the commitments Israel entered into under these agreements do not meet the bare minimum requirements for the improvement of the social, economic, political and security situation of the Palestinian people, nor do they meet the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, and to resolve their situation in general.

In spite of the present Israeli Government's professed good intentions, and in spite of the preliminary steps it has made during the last few months to meet some of its commitments, we believe that these measures are completely inadequate. They are characterized by selectivity and by a lack of serious commitment to meet

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Israel's moral, political and legal obligations. How else can the international community view the continuation of international Israeli policies of building illegal settlements and expanding the present ones and confiscating more territory and property and natural resources — such as water resources in Palestinian territories and in the occupied Arab territories, including the Holy City of Al-Quds al-Sharif. These policies are being carried out in a manner that completely contradicts the letter and spirit of the peace process.

We would like to express our disappointment regarding evidence provided by certain official international statistics to the effect that since 1967 the Israeli Government has confiscated no less than 75 per cent of the Palestinian territory in Al-Quds al-Sharif. It has established approximately 40,000 settler units and has destroyed more than 2,500 Arab homes.

It has confiscated the identification cards of hundreds of native Palestinian inhabitants of the city in an attempt to deprive them of their right of residence there. We are also deeply concerned by the decision made last July by the Israeli Ministry of Housing and Construction to add 2,594 settlement units near Al-Quds. It is also pursuing its policy of establishing the largest, most dangerous and illegal Jewish settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim and in Ras al-Amud. It has also stepped up its efforts to build bypass roads that encircle the Arab quarters of the city in an attempt to impose its civil administration there. It does all this for the sole purpose of expanding and changing the religious, historic, legal, demographic and cultural characteristics of this holy Arab city and in order to impose a fait accompli that will affect the final settlement of the other aspects of the Palestinian question.

These unjustified and dangerous Israeli policies in the sacred Arab city of Al-Quds, in addition to other aggressive measures — such as the closure of cities and villages, the imposition of measures to curtail Palestinian freedom of movement and economic expansion, and the refusal to release the remaining detainees and prisoners — are all aimed at delaying the implementation of the measures of the second and third phases of redeployment of forces and withdrawal from the occupied territories. In addition, these policies impose extremely difficult conditions for the Palestinians, affecting a range of activities from operating the seaport in Gaza to opening the safe passage in the North between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. All these measures and policies are null, void and in flagrant violation of Israel's commitments in the context of the peace process, based on resolutions of international legitimacy, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of land for peace.

All these difficult challenges, imposed by Israeli intransigence, to the efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine lead us to renew our assertion that the United Nations and its specialized agencies still form the natural basis of international legitimacy for handling this question. The United Nations should compel Israel to implement all its commitments in strict compliance with its relevant resolutions. In this respect, while we commend the positive role played by the United States in addressing all the obstacles to the peace process and thank it for its continuous support, we hope that the peace sponsors and the European Union will redouble their efforts to enable the establishment of a just and lasting peace that will allow the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights to self-determination and the establishment of their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

While the Emirates welcome all international and regional efforts to revive the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, we also reiterate our full support for the positions of the Governments of Syria and Lebanon calling for the resumption of the negotiations at the point where they left off, without preconditions and in a manner that would ensure complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967 and from southern Lebanon and the Beka'a Valley, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and with the principle of land for peace.

Finally, while we believe that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East requires an equitable and balanced treatment of the various aspects of the question of Palestine relating to the settlements, Al-Quds, the refugees, security, borders and water resources, which are to be addressed in the final status negotiations, we call upon the Israeli Government to commit itself to the principles governing the solution to these problems in a manner commensurate with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy stipulating the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and designating Al-Quds as an integral part of Arab and Palestinian occupied territories. Israel must withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967, including Al-Quds and the Syrian Golan Heights. We also reaffirm that the security measures required by the Israeli Government should be reciprocal, entailing above all complete respect

for the security and stability of the Palestinian people and neighbouring States and the elimination of all forms of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, so that the people of the region may live in peace, security, stability and prosperity.

Mr. Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The question of Palestine, which has been on the General Assembly's agenda for decades, has brought us together again today. As always, Cuba reiterates its total rejection of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and raises its voice to call for an end of abuses and for the absolute respect of all the rights of the Palestinian people.

Cuba shares the desire of the international community to find a solution to the problems that affect stability in the Middle East. This must include a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem, which is undoubtedly its core. It is unthinkable that we can manage to strengthen the peace process while the Palestinian people are unable effectively and fully to enjoy their fundamental rights.

All of the resolutions of the General Assembly on the Palestinian question remain relevant. The Security Council itself, through 25 resolutions adopted over the years, has confirmed its recognition of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. On 15 July, in response to recommendations made in the various resolutions adopted at the tenth emergency session of the General Assembly, for the first time in the history of the Geneva Conventions a conference of the High Contracting Parties was convened to consider the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories. The conference not only reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also reiterated the need for its provisions to be respected in the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation.

The beginning of this decade was marked by hopeful steps for the peace process in the Middle East. The Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 and the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993 were historic moments and significant contributions to the effort to obtain a lasting peace. More recently, the Wye River Memorandum reawakened the hopes of the international community and, for a moment, it seemed that the solution to the Palestinian problem and peace in the region were about to become realities.

However, we have witnessed the numerous obstacles that have been placed on the road to peace: the building of new settlements in the occupied territories, the violation of the international status of Jerusalem, the flagrant human rights violations of the Palestinian people, the unilateral suspension of the Wye River agreements. These have confirmed the opposition of Israeli authorities to progress in the peace process in the Middle East.

The signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999 by President Yassir Arafat and Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Barak has once again revived hopes and a cautious optimism, as well as the possibility of advancing towards a just and lasting peace which will put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories. The results remain to be seen, and despite the fact that there have been positive signs, the international community is dismayed to see that violation of the international rights and human rights of the Palestinian people and the illegal settlements in occupied territories have continued.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to have an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and rejects the measures designed to change the legal status and the demographic composition of that city. We demand the return of all Palestinian territories occupied by Israel. Cuba advocates respect for human rights and the application of the principles of international humanitarian law to the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people today are experiencing a crucial step in their torturous path towards the fulfilment of all their legitimate rights.

Today more than ever our Palestinian brothers require the support of all peoples of the world. Today more than ever the voice and action of the international community must avoid any manoeuvering by the enemies of peace, who want to continue to foster a climate of hate and ignorance in the region. Today more than ever the Palestinian people require the support of the General Assembly and of the United Nations.

Cuba hopes that peace will emerge in the Middle East, an unconditional, just and genuine peace. Convinced that that moment will arrive, we wish to reiterate the firm commitment of the Cuban people and Government to the noble and just cause of the Palestinian people and their full support for the exercise of their legitimate and inalienable rights.

Mr. Sharma (India): Yesterday we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This provided the international community yet another opportunity to demonstrate its support for the realization of the cherished goals and aspirations of the people of Palestine. The Government and people of India once again reaffirm their solidarity with the people of Palestine, who have striven valiantly over the past decades for the restoration of their legitimate rights. India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people is firm and unshakeable and is based on a rich and varied interaction over the ages.

This year we observe this solemn occasion with hope in our hearts. The last year of the millennium has witnessed developments which could lead to a fair and just settlement of the Palestinian question. India welcomes the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1999 and is happy to note that many provisions of this Memorandum have been implemented, including opening of the southern safe passage route connecting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the release of Palestinian political prisoners. Unilateral steps should be eschewed, and all provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum should be faithfully implemented. An atmosphere of mutual trust is necessary for the timely completion of permanent status negotiations to realize a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We are aware that the road to peace, while paved with good intentions, is tortuous and strewn with impediments. Often the last steps are the most difficult.

India has consistently stood for a peaceful solution to all disputes. We have been closely following developments concerning the Middle East peace process and remain vitally interested in the ushering in of peace, development and stability in the region. The courageous initial steps by visionaries, united in their aim to put an end to decades of conflict, need to be boldly carried forward in the quest for lasting peace and friendship. We salute the courage and the spirit of accommodation and optimism shown by the parties which has resulted in an outline for a just solution to the Palestinian question.

Political support for the peace process needs to be reinforced by support for the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The efforts of the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the fields of health, education and the creation of employment, need to be encouraged and assisted. Infrastructural development is a primary area of focus. The challenge posed by the pressing requirements of financial and technological support merits the urgent attention of the international community.

India stands ready, as in the past, to extend material and technical assistance in a spirit of solidarity to the Palestinian people in their important task of nation-building. A Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Cooperation between the Government of India and the Palestinian Authority was signed during the visit of President Yassir Arafat to India in November 1997. We seek to assist the Palestinian people through scholarships and exchange programmes. India pledged $1 million as assistance to the Palestinian people at the first Washington donors conference in October 1995. Subsequently India pledged further sums of $1 million each at donor conferences held in Paris in January 1996 and in Washington in November 1998. These pledges are being utilized for the provision of goods, for undertaking projects in the territory of the Palestinian National Authority and for human resource development. From the amount pledged in 1998 a sum of $300,000 has been disbursed to the Al-Azhar University in Gaza for the expansion of its library. Since 1996 we have offered more than 148 specialized training slots at an estimated cost of Rs. 13.1 million. During the current financial year, 1999-2000, 30 training slots have been utilized. Moreover, India has been a regular contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

We recognize that it is incumbent on all of us to work together to help move the peace process in West Asia. However, ultimately it is the parties themselves that have to shoulder the major responsibility for achieving a permanent and lasting solution. The spirit of accommodation and the political will displayed in jump-starting the stalled negotiations recently reflect the desire of the people in the region to arrive at a just and comprehensive peace. Let us not be found wanting in the crucial days ahead.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso)(*spoke in French*): Yesterday morning in the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Today, in the debate on the question of Palestine, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), through me, wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinian people, who, under the aegis of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Chairman,

Mr. Yassir Arafat, are fighting vigorously to regain their legitimate rights.

General Assembly resolution 52/52, which is based on the principle of land for peace and is one of the cornerstones for the settlement of the Palestinian question, has obviously not yet been fully implemented. Nor have Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), key components in any solution to the situation in the Middle East.

Moreover, the peace process begun in Madrid, coming directly out of the Oslo accords, has, as we know, been frozen following the procrastination — not to say reversals — by the Israeli side. Nevertheless, the international community is relieved to note that despite the many obstructions, misunderstandings and distrust that have characterized the relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, both parties are clearly taking the path to peace. Indeed, the signing of the Wye River accord by the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization was an important and very encouraging step that opened up the way to final status negotiations. Also, the signing by the two parties of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum is certainly a further step in the right direction.

All of these initiatives are a basis for a comprehensive and just settlement to the Palestinian question, provided that this favourable wind continues to blow all the goodwill in the direction of a clearer understanding of the supreme benefits of a definitive understanding between the protagonists. In clear terms, as the report of the Secretary-General on this question recalls, all the parties are called on

> "to implement in full their commitments under existing agreements and to refrain from actions that pre-empt the negotiations and worsen both the political and the economic situation in the Palestinian territories, and to abide scrupulously by their obligations under international law". (*A/54/457, para.3*)

As regards these obligations, Israel must put an end to all of the depredations inflicted on the Palestinian people, in particular by returning lands improperly confiscated, halting the aggressive settlement of occupied territories and putting an end to the various forms of violence against the Palestinian populations. It goes without saying that the rights of the Palestinian people to have and to live in a sovereign and independent Palestinian State are inalienable and non-negotiable.

However, it is essential that the international community accompany both parties in their efforts to put an end to half a century of conflict. Thus, we cannot but welcome the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. We are sure that this involvement on the ground will be a source of strength for the just solution to this question.

The obligations of the international community also involve economic, financial and technical assistance to help the Palestinian people emerge from the underdevelopment to which they have been consigned by these 50 years of deadlock and conflict.

In this momentum towards peace, we would like once again to congratulate warmly the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka. Their actions are in perfect keeping with the strategy for a just solution to the Palestinian question. We also welcome the propitious initiative of Bethlehem 2000, the realization of which is soon to come about.

Recalling the birth of Christ in the land of Islam, as proposed by the Palestinian Authority, means transcending the prejudices that frequently underlie human misunderstandings. This is a display of great maturity and recognizes, above all, that love, fraternity and tolerance are transcendent values that can bring people together — even those who are divided by insurmountable antagonisms.

May these virtues continue to inspire all people of goodwill, and in particular, the Palestinians and Israelis, so that in this land of the Middle East, the cradle of a very prestigious civilization and the point of confluence of the revealed religions, the flame of peace will be lit again for ever.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Yesterday the United Nations observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is fitting that yesterday and today the General Assembly is considering agenda items 44 and 43, respectively, on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. With your permission, Mr. President, we will combine our comments on those two items into the present statement.

We would like to thank the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, for his very able leadership of the Committee and for the presentation of the comprehensive report contained in document A/54/35.

For the last half century, the question of Palestine has been discussed in this Assembly, and the international community has been repeatedly calling upon all parties concerned to make every effort for the promotion of peace in the region and has asked Israel to halt its illegal activities and end its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories.

Foreign occupation in itself constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights. Prolonged occupation only worsens the process of reconciliation. Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories represents an utter violation of and persistent disregard for international law. In continuing its agenda of suppressing resistance to occupation, Israel applies tactics that generate various forms of human rights violations.

Bangladesh firmly believes that for a lasting peace in the Middle East the question of Palestine needs to be addressed seriously. Nothing short of a peaceful settlement of the Palestine question would help in the resolution of the continuing crisis in the region. The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people have to be recognized and realized. Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and occupied Arab territories, including the Golan, is essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

In a message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, yesterday, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, said,

> "The observance of the Day in the last year of this century will bear special meaning only if the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are established in a sovereign Palestinian State and a comprehensive and durable peace is achieved in the Middle East before the next Day of Solidarity, in the new millennium".

Israeli settlement in the occupied territories has always been a source of tension. The tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was resumed twice to address this and other violations of international law by Israel. Resolutions were adopted by an overwhelming majority. We are disappointed that out of 194 Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, as many as 67 settlements had been expanded or built since the signing of the Oslo accords. It is regrettable that instead of continuing the process of freezing settlement activities, Israel authorized the building of new settlements, including the one in Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. The completion of this settlement will eventually have a significant effect on the demography of East Jerusalem. We are disturbed to learn that the Israeli authorities recently invited tenders for the actual construction of the housing units there.

The Israeli decision with regard to the expansion of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem was discussed in the Security Council in June 1998. The international community urged Israel to refrain from implementation of its decision because such a plan would create a further imbalance in the population structure in the city in violation of the moratorium imposed by the Council. We are concerned at the Israeli decision to earmark its settlement activities as a national priority. This is another deliberate provocation to the feeling of the people of the occupied territories.

Palestinian political prisoners who remain in Israeli jails also continue to be subjected to torture and other forms of ill treatment and human rights violations. Such actions are in no way favourable to the Middle East peace process. Similarly, confiscation of land and restricting access to water resources and demolishing houses in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the Golan, will in no way bring about the desired peace in the region. The indiscriminate destruction of lives and property in southern Lebanon has become a routine affair.

Bangladesh expresses its utter condemnation of the Israeli policy of systematic violation of basic human rights in the occupied territories. We express our total solidarity with our Palestinian and Arab brothers in this regard. We would like to reiterate here that, under the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the occupying Power is obliged to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation. The Security Council, in 25 resolutions, adopted over years, has reconfirmed its recognition of applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the territories, including Jerusalem, occupied since 1967. Hence, there is no scope for unilateral refusal.

We call upon Israel to terminate completely its occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories, including Jerusalem, without delay. This will constitute a significant step forward in the realization of peace in the region. Bangladesh considers the Wye River Memorandum of October 1998 and the signing in Cairo of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999 by Israel and Palestine as promising. The agreements are to be implemented in letter and spirit to facilitate the peace process. Bangladesh strongly favours the idea that the fate of Jerusalem must be an element in the Palestinian-Israeli talks on the final status of the Palestinian territories. We would like to underscore the need for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, as well as other subsequent agreements reached among the parties aimed at a resolution of the problem. We also reaffirm our conviction that the Palestine issue is the core of the Middle East problem.

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine and the other Arab territories under Israeli occupation until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is achieved. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations and the international community is essential for a successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Let me conclude by affirming that Bangladesh has joined in sponsoring the draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly for decision under agenda items 43 and 44.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Last year, at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, like the majority of Member States, we expressed our concern over the grave deterioration of the peace process in the Middle East. At present we are particularly pleased to see that, thanks to the concerted efforts made by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, as well as the consistent support of the international community, the peace process has been reignited with the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999. We very much welcome this development and express the hope that the parties concerned will seriously carry out their commitments, continue to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach, implement the existing agreements in earnest and push the peace process forward on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We sincerely believe that such an approach constitutes the only realistic way that would lead to a just solution of the problem of Palestine.

The question of Palestine is of course, one of the thorniest issues of our time. However, we believe that this problem, like many other thorny problems the world faces, can be resolved, provided that the parties directly concerned have the necessary political will to resolve it. The Palestinian people have suffered far too long, and the international community must do everything possible to assist the two parties in resolving their problems. It is true that the road to peace is not an easy one, because numerous obstacles still remain. However, the cause of peace is just and represents the ardent hope of the peoples of the region to live together, to cooperate and to coexist peacefully. It is therefore incumbent upon us all to do whatever we possibly can to ensure that the peace process in the Middle East can move forward.

The question of Palestine is the core of the Middle East problem. Only when the Palestinian issue is resolved in a just and reasonable manner and all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are restored can Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace. In this context, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the Lao People's Democratic Republic's unwavering support for the Palestinian people, under the leadership of the PLO, in their struggle to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State in their homeland. The international community is duty-bound to continue to work to assist the Palestinian people in the search for a just and durable solution to their problem.

On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was created. We all welcomed that event. The international community today impatiently awaits the creation of an independent Palestinian State, a good and friendly neighbour of Israel, in accordance with the partition plan adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947. It is in this spirit of optimism that my delegation sees the future of the Middle East region. Let us only wish all the best to the two parties directly concerned — Israel and the PLO — in their common and noble efforts to resolve their differences.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): Yesterday, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the President of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, conveyed, on behalf of the Government and people of Sri Lanka, warm felicitations and best wishes to President Arafat and the people of the

State of Palestine. The President of Sri Lanka noted in her message that Sri Lanka has always considered the question of Palestine to be at the core of the concerns of the Middle East region; that Sri Lanka has constantly and consistently supported the Palestinian people in their endeavours to realize their inalienable national rights; that Sri Lanka shares the satisfaction of the international community over the progress achieved despite the delays and the obstacles in the bilateral Palestine-Israel negotiations for peace; and that Sri Lanka believes in the creation of a new Palestinian State by September 2000. I have the honour today, on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, to convey the same sentiments and beliefs to the General Assembly as it considers the question of Palestine.

The question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations for the past 50 years. It has been one of the principal responsibilities of the United Nations to keep the quest of the Palestinian people for the realization of their inalienable national rights in the public eye. It is a responsibility that the General Assembly in particular has discharged conscientiously. The General Assembly has done so principally through its Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

To the Chairman of the Committee — the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka — to the Committee as a whole and to the offices of the Secretariat that work with the Committee — in particular, I believe, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information — much appreciation is due should be conveyed; and I do so on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka.

The Committee, in its report that is now before the General Assembly, speaks, among other matters, of the conditions in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live — the problems which in fundamental ways affect Palestinian lands, Palestinian lives, Palestinian hopes and dreams, ways that are clearly contrary to the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, whose applicability has been declared by both the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The reports of the Committee over the years have informed the General Assembly of the difficult circumstances affecting the Palestinians. The reports of the Committee and the General Assembly's discussions of the reports may contribute, and possibly do contribute, to the evolution of a more enlightened and sensitive perspective among Israeli authorities responsible for or aware of the administration of the occupied territories — a more enlightened and sensitive perspective that appears to have been present in the decision a few months ago by the Supreme Court of Israel to prohibit extreme coercive methods of interrogation, and in the decision a few weeks ago to ease the residency restrictions on Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

The reports of the Committee constitute, therefore, important channels through which anxieties relating to the daily lives of the Palestinians — concerns as to their economic and social and human circumstances — are voiced while the intricate complexities of the peace process gradually unfold.

There are passages in the report of the Committee now before the General Assembly, however, that point to actions on the part of the Israeli authorities that are considered to be disruptive of the peace process and of the trust on which the processes of peace must proceed: settlements, and the tensions surrounding settlements — activities inconsistent with the occupied status of East Jerusalem in the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Thus, the clouds of the ever-present tension, violence and fear continue to cast a shadow over and darken expectations.

Those in a position to do so have endeavoured tirelessly to move all concerned towards the ultimate goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Following the May 1999 elections in Israel, there were signs of the presence of a more enlightened, more sensitive view: the resumption in August of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; Israeli troop redeployment; release of Palestinian prisoners; the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum; and the commitment to conclude a framework agreement for, and a comprehensive agreement by September 2000, on all permanent status issues.

The delegation of Sri Lanka joins other delegations in the hope expressed earlier by so many who have come to this podium that, on the eve of the new millennium, the bilateral negotiations on which the two parties — Israel and Palestine — have embarked will be satisfactorily concluded and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, long awaited by all the peoples of the region, will at last be achieved, resolving the many political, social and human difficulties that trouble the lives of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories.

Ms. Nicholls (Guyana): Guyana joins the international community in solidarity with the Palestinian

people in their continuing struggle for their inalienable rights, including the right to a settled homeland.

It is unacceptable that in this era of democratization, a population of over 3.6 million is still without a land of its own and condemned to live in refugees camps, often in subhuman conditions. Their uncertain situation can only breed discontent and despair, leading inevitably to conflict. Almost every day, one reads of incidents resulting from the tension that prevails in the relations between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. When will this tension cease and harmonious coexistence come? For with every step of progress made towards peace, it appears that two steps are taken backwards.

Notwithstanding such frustration, a long-sought solution can now be seen, albeit through a glass darkly, on the horizon. For while reports on developments in the Middle East are generally discouraging, there is an occasional glimmer of hope that leads to the belief that, like seemingly intractable problems elsewhere, the Palestinian problem can be resolved. Certainly, the overture to a new dialogue, although hesitant and tentative, can reveal new vistas for agreements based on principles enunciated over the years by the United Nations. Agreement will come only, however, if there is bold and strong leadership on both sides and if they are willing to grasp the opportunity of the moment. Equally important will be popular support for reason over irrationality to promote a new spirit of mutual tolerance and trust.

We remain convinced that the peace process can and will work if all the parties involved are prepared to negotiate seriously and in good faith. We welcome the resumption of Israeli- Palestinian negotiations, as well as the signing of the 4 September 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on the Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. We urge the vigilance of the United Nations, and in particular of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to ensure that these negotiations are conducted in good faith. We also welcome the initiatives by interested countries to maintain the momentum for peace by encouraging the parties to remain in meaningful dialogue.

In this context, we recognize the magnanimity of the many neighbouring and other friendly countries which, though facing their own economic difficulties, have valiantly supported the peace process, and in practical terms have assisted and accommodated the Palestinian refugees by providing them with shelter, food and health care. We encourage those States to continue their solid support of the Palestinian people until their struggle has finally been won.

Special mention must also be made of the contribution made by United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which in May next year will mark its fiftieth year of existence. UNRWA's mandate includes the provision of health care and education and the meeting of other basic needs of the Palestinian peoples, and the Agency has fulfilled that mandate satisfactorily over the past five decades. The Refugee Working Group headed by Canada has also played a very significant role in helping to raise financial assistance for the Palestinian refugees in the Middle East.

We urge, as an essential dynamic to the peace process, an expansion of the bilateral cooperation which has taken place, albeit in small tentative steps, with the creation of the Palestinian Authority and new prospects for improved relations. Opportunities for joint Palestinian-Israeli development cooperation are significant in that they can help to pave the way for political cooperation. We wish to comment especially on the initiative taken by both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government to celebrate the millennium. Their coming together will serve to inspire the Governments and peoples of the region to heighten their determination to solve the Palestinian problem and in the process bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

As we know, as a result of the initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Peace Prize Laureates, the year 2000 will be the International Year for the Culture of Peace. The global campaign is expected to produce the signature by as many as 100 million persons worldwide of the Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence. These signatures, which will be presented to the Secretary-General during the Millennium Assembly next year, will represent a peaceful call for an end to conflict everywhere, including the Middle East. We can only pray that this unprecedented appeal will not go unheard and that before too long, the just aspirations of the Palestinian people will be fully satisfied.

Mr. Islam (Pakistan): The General Assembly is considering the item on the "Question of Palestine" to express the international community's support for the struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable

right to self-determination. Though the issue has been debated in this forum for over 51 years, there remain many roadblocks in the way of a comprehensive and final settlement.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to His late Majesty King Hassan of Morocco and His late Majesty King Hussein of Jordan for their support to, and espousal of, the Palestinian cause.

Pakistan has steadfastly supported the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. No lasting peace in the Middle East will be possible without a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

The significance of the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the international community in general and the Islamic Ummah in particular requires no elaboration. Al-Quds Al-Sharif remains central to any comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

We believe that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) provide a viable and just framework for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

We have noted the recent developments in the Middle East peace process, particularly on the Palestine-Israeli track. Pakistan considers the signing on 4 September 1999 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations between Israel and Palestine a positive development. The implementation of commitments concerning the opening of the passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the partial release of prisoners is a positive development. Progress needs to be made on the phased redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank. We hope that progress will also be achieved in future negotiations on the permanent status issues within the agreed time-frame of September 2000.

Despite the progress made in negotiations, Israel continues with its illegal settlement activities. We note with concern that the construction of new, and the expansion of existing, settlements continues to be carried out in disregard of the concerns expressed by the international community. A large number of Palestinian prisoners still remain in Israeli jails, and they continue to receive harsh treatment by the Israeli authorities. Such actions can destabilize the positive environment created after the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community, particularly the guarantors of the peace process, to use their influence and good offices to ensure full Israeli compliance with the peace agreements. The faithful implementation of all agreements is essential to avert the reversion of the region to conflict and political turmoil.

We salute the people of Palestine for the strides they have made towards realizing their right to self-determination. We have full confidence in the Palestinian leadership and its statesmanship, far-sightedness and wisdom in promoting a peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our full political, moral, diplomatic and material support to our Palestinian brethren in their heroic struggle, particularly at this critical phase in their history.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): Yesterday the United Nations observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The commemoration of that important occasion serves as a reminder to the international community of its continuing responsibility towards the Palestinian people in their quest for just and lasting peace and security in their own homeland.

Such a reminder is of particular significance since, at the dawning of the new millennium, we again find ourselves in an encouraging situation with the conclusion of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999. This step represents a new hope after decades of suffering and dispossession for the Palestinian people and numerous peace attempts and failed initiatives.

While it is fitting to commend the parties for their courage and commitment, which resulted in the signing of the agreement, it remains necessary to be cautiously optimistic because of the complexity and sensitivity of the outstanding issues. The steps taken so far, such as the release of prisoners and further redeployment from the West Bank in implementation of the Memorandum, are welcome. However, the continuation of the settlement activities by Israel remains a formidable obstacle that could derail the peace process. It is thus imperative for the international community to sustain its efforts to promote the cause of peace until a comprehensive, just

and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and peace and stability in the entire region are secured.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People remains at the forefront in campaigning for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which is essential for international peace and security. We commend the courageous and important initiatives of the Committee, and in particular, its Chairman, my brother and colleague, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in fulfilling this role. The convening of important international events, such as the African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, again played an invaluable role in heightening international awareness of the question of Palestine and in achieving wider recognition in favour of the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights. Therefore, my delegation also fully associates itself with the report of the Chairman of the Committee.

The question of Palestine remains central in all efforts to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. The inalienable rights of the Palestine people will have to be recognized and realized. The presence of nearly 4 million refugees in refugee camps in the region, living in harsh and dismal conditions, is an example of a human tragedy that can be addressed only through a comprehensive peace settlement, based on the full implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions.

To underline this point, I consider it important to recall here the words of the Secretary-General, who, in paragraph 10 of a recent report (S/1999/1175) on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, stated, *inter alia*,

> "Despite the present quiet in the Israeli-Syrian sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached."

The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between Palestine and Israel was a welcome breakthrough in the stalled peace process. It is the sincere hope of my delegation that the spirit of cooperation in which the agreement was reached will contribute to the full implementation of previous accords reached between the parties. The parties have now embarked on the final status negotiations, and have set tight deadlines for themselves, such as a framework agreement to be reached by February 2000 and a final agreement, by September 2000. However, with the necessary support from the international community, a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine is certainly within reach.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and express our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine at a significant moment, as we stand on the threshold of the approaching millennium. For more than half a century, the world has borne witness to the struggle of a whole people and a whole nation for their inalienable rights, including the right to establish a sovereign and independent homeland. Indeed, no issue has preoccupied the United Nations since its inception more than the question of Palestine. It is a tragedy of momentous proportions that, while the international scene has undergone profound changes since the newly established United Nations placed this item on its agenda over five decades ago, the people of Palestine have yet to recover the inalienable rights that were unjustly taken away from them. The passage of all these years does not diminish the sacred cause of the Palestinians.

Today the Palestinian people have reached a decisive moment in their history, when the unfolding peace process could not only transform their lives and their land but also have a profound impact, in the region and beyond it. When the historic breakthrough first took place in 1993, followed by other agreements and initiatives, we fervently hoped along with the rest of the international community that lasting peace was within reach. During the past three years, however, our hopes have dissipated in the face of reneged commitments, illegal acts and transgressions. Therefore, we were gratified by the signing on 4 September 1999 by the Palestinian leaders and by Israel of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. It is pertinent to note that the Memorandum touched upon some important issues, including further phased redeployment from the West Bank, phased release of Palestinian prisoners, agreement on safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the beginning of construction work on the Gaza seaport, and agreements on the city of Hebron and on security-related issues.

While acknowledging some positive developments towards the implementation of the Memorandum since its signing, such as the first phase of Israeli redeployment from the West Bank and the release of 350 Palestinian prisoners, it is crucial that the remaining matters be carried out in good faith and in accordance with the agreed timetable. Likewise, the beginning of final status negotiations is a welcome development. In this regard, my delegation has noted the commitment of the parties concerned to conclude a framework agreement in the next few months and to reach a comprehensive agreement by September 2000.

For the peace process to move decisively forward, it is essential to replace the past years of suspicion and discord with goodwill and mutual trust. For this to occur, there must be a marked change in Israeli policies with regard to situations on the ground that are in contravention of United Nations resolutions and international law and thus undermine efforts towards achieving lasting peace. Foremost among these are the expansion of settlements and the confiscation of land by the Israeli authorities in various parts of the occupied territories, especially in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim. Such unilateral actions must cease immediately, for they severely diminish the hopes and expectations generated by recent developments within the framework of the peace process.

In response to such illegal activities, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, pursuant to the provisions of resolution ES-10/5 of 17 March 1998, was resumed for the fourth time on 5 February 1999, resulting in the convening on 15 July 1999 of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, the first in history. In this regard, it reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Cognizant of the illegality of Israel's settlement activities, the conference adjourned on the understanding that it would be reconvened should the need arise in the light of developments concerning the humanitarian situation.

Other issues that need to be urgently addressed are the question of refugees, the release of remaining prisoners, and the critical water supply situation in the territories. Despite the formidable challenges and obstacles strewn along the way, the valiant Palestinian people and its leaders have held steadfast to the path towards the achievement of stable peace. The reignited peace process should be sustained and nurtured, and trust and confidence should be fostered among the parties. To that end, it is imperative to forge ahead with the scrupulous implementation of all peace agreements, and to demonstrate the necessary flexibility and commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, a peaceful settlement which would include the securing of justice and freedom for the Palestinian people and sovereign statehood over their lands.

For peace to flourish and grow, the parties must also surmount the decades of occupation and injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people, which have gravely undermined the socio-economic fabric of their society. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations, its agencies and the donor community have a central role to play in extending their support in the challenging tasks of nation building. We are therefore gratified by the appointment of Mr. Terje Rod Larsen as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as the focal point of the efforts of the Organization and to maintain contact with the donor community and with non-governmental organizations in this field. Given the paramount importance of the development of the Palestinian economy, it is gratifying to note that at a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, held on 14 and 15 October 1999 in Tokyo, a number of donors adopted a tripartite plan to expedite assistance for the implementation of essential plans. These assistance efforts are crucial if the Palestinian people are to transform their land from one of poverty and pestilence to one of prosperity and sustainable development.

In this regard, Indonesia fully supports the Bethlehem 2000 celebration. This will mark an auspicious beginning to a new era of dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation for the people of Bethlehem, and will be a significant effort to mobilize the support of the international community for the urgent cause of economic recovery for the Palestinian people. We are equally appreciative of the unstinting efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in discharging its mandate to alleviate the plight of 3.6 million Palestinian refugees by undertaking activities in a number of crucial sectors.

It was more than half a century ago that the General Assembly was seized of the question of Palestine and adopted resolution 181 (II). Throughout these long and arduous years, more time and effort has been expended on the question of Palestine than on any other international problem. Yet the aspirations of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood

have not been fulfilled. Without a shadow of doubt, the United Nations will have a permanent responsibility on the question of Palestine until a comprehensive settlement is attained based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and on international legitimacy. For its part, Indonesia has consistently maintained that a just and lasting solution to this seemingly intractable problem can be achieved only if the Palestinian people are allowed to regain their legitimate national rights, including the right of all refugees to return to their own independent homeland with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and based on the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace.

In embracing the next millennium as the winds of peace begin to engulf the region, we fervently hope that peace will be permanently anchored in the Middle East and that its people, particularly the Palestinian people who have endured much pain and suffering for too long, will finally achieve their cherished aspirations in a homeland of their own, like all other peoples of the world.

Mr. Legwaila (Botswana): The search for peace in the Middle East continues unabated. The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has achieved a great deal despite its interminable ups and downs and prolonged breakdowns and brinkmanship. The leaders of Palestine and Israel who, despite the deep-rooted bitterness and enmities of their shared past, have found a good measure of common ground in their quest for a just dispensation for their people, deserve our support, commendation and encouragement for their tenacity and fortitude.

But they still have a long way to go to achieve real peace for their people. The negotiations for a final settlement have just begun, and they promise to be unrelenting in their complexity, sensitivity and stubbornness. This is largely because the price of peace has never been cheap. Each side has already taken many risks and paid many prices to achieve the phenomenal progress that has culminated in the establishment of a Palestinian Authority which has given the Palestinian people, for the first time in a long time, a sense of belonging and ownership.

The choices for the Palestinians and Israelis, if there are any choices, are limited. We dare not contemplate the possibility that either side would wish to lose sight of the final objective of the peace process, which is durable peace for the State of Israel within secure borders, and peace, freedom and independence for the Palestinian people in a country they can rightly and proudly call their own.

The alternative to the realization of this objective is beyond conjecture. The failure by the two sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, not only to sustain the peace process but to give it momentum, to infuse it with a new zeal, would play into the hands of those in the area who are allergic to peaceful coexistence between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The agents of violence must not be given any quarter.

A resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would no doubt open new vistas for the quest for a comprehensive dispensation for the Middle East area as a whole. Israel and all its Arab neighbours beyond Palestine have to come to terms with one another if peace between the State of Israel and Palestine, whenever it is reached, is to have any meaning at all. The two are interlocked. There must be peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, Lebanon, Syria and others, if peace between Israel and the Palestinians is to survive and thrive.

Peace in the area, between the Arabs and the Jews, can only come about through negotiations conducted in good faith by all concerned. The point of departure in these negotiations must of necessity involve, as a central element, the recognition and acceptance by all the parties of the ineluctable reality of one another's right to exist. The Palestinians and the State of Israel have made progress in their negotiations precisely because they have accepted each other's right to exist. They have realized that the peace of the brave is the peace they must seek for their people, not the peace of the grave. It is our hope, therefore, that there will be no more war in the Middle East as the Arab nation and the Jewish people come to realize that they are chained together by a common destiny in a common ancestral land. It is in their interest and in the interest of the entire world to ensure that those in the area who either seek change through violence or are fanatically opposed to the normalization of relations between the Arabs and the Jews — that is, the rejectionists on both sides — do not succeed in their evil designs.

Let me conclude by reiterating Botswana's unalterable support for the struggle for peace and reconciliation between the people of Israel and of Palestine. We urge them to persist in their determination to bring finality to their peace process, a finality which must, at long last, give the people of Israel a sense of security and the Palestinians a real sense of nationhood, independence, freedom and peace. May the new

millennium bring peace and tranquillity to the Middle East region as a whole.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): Like many other delegations, my delegation would like to believe that with the advent of the new millennium the question of Palestine is about to take a turn for the better. We have seen a steady development in the last few years. All these developments — the Oslo Accords, the Madrid Peace Conference, the Wye River Memorandum, the Hebron Protocol, and the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum — have hopefully moved the process towards an eventual successful conclusion.

My delegation believes that the root of the problems in the Middle East is the long-standing question of Palestine. The key to a solution lies in the restoration of the legitimate and inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people. Only this can bring stability, development and a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Since the discussion on this subject at the last session of the General Assembly, the peace process has moved forward, albeit erratically. We believe that the principle of the return of land for peace as provided by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) would bring the desired solution to the Palestinian question.

My delegation ardently believes and hopes that with the advent of the new Administration in Israel headed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, we are going to witness a change of attitude on the part of the Israeli Government. The Administration has so far demonstrated a willingness to work towards a fair and permanent solution of the Palestinian question. This is very welcome.

As the parties prepare for the final status negotiations, my delegation would plead with them to be guided by the spirit behind the Oslo Accords, the Madrid Conference results, the Wye River Memorandum, the Hebron Protocol and the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum. The people of Palestine are impatient, and understandably so. But the fact that the parties are communicating is very important and needs our encouragement.

Questions have always been raised as to the role of the United Nations in the peace process. The questions of Palestine in particular and the Middle East in general have been on the agenda since the inception of the Organization. The Middle East is a very sensitive region of the world, affecting international peace and security. The United Nations is naturally interested in what is happening in that area. Tanzania supports the United Nations involvement because it serves as an exhortation to the parties to proceed with the peace process rather than obstructing it. We believe the United Nations is competent to help and capable of helping work towards a permanent solution to the Palestinian question.

In conclusion, my delegation is optimistic that final status talks will be successful. It behooves all the parties to prepare well and proceed from the knowledge that the United Nations, through its numerous resolutions, is very keen that at long last an enduring solution be negotiated. Peace is of the essence, but it has to be based on justice. We pray that the parties will rise to the occasion and realize one of the yearnings of the people of Palestine — to have their own nation. It is our fervent hope that when we meet in September 2000 for the Millennium Summit there will be a new political dispensation in Palestine.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Agenda item 43

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/457, A/54/495)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.40, A/54/L.41)

Ms. Rasi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein and Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

There is now real momentum towards peace in the Middle East. This autumn we have already witnessed two significant steps forward — the signature of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the resumption of the final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians. These steps have created a positive atmosphere that should be further nurtured on all tracks.

The European Union welcomes both steps. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum puts implementation of the earlier agreements back on track and provides an ambitious timetable for negotiating a permanent end to the long-standing conflict between the two peoples.

These steps required courage and determination on the part of the two leaders: Prime Minister Barak and President Arafat. The outcome was largely a result of direct negotiations between the parties. This is a significant new reality, and it bodes well for the next steps of the process.

The European Union hopes that progress on the Palestinian track will have positive effects on the Middle East as a whole. It is high time to reinvigorate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace based on the principle of land for peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In this context we reiterate our call for urgent implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and we welcome all steps taken or planned in that regard. Regarding south Lebanon, the security of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) must be guaranteed by all parties concerned under all circumstances.

The European Union strongly supports the right of Israel to live within secure and recognized borders. We condemn in the strongest terms acts of terrorism and stress our determination to fight terrorism wherever it occurs. We urge all the parties in the peace process to do their utmost to forestall extremist actions and to deny success to extremists and others seeking to frustrate the process through provocation.

It is essential that the parties fully honour their obligations in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo processes, with a view to building mutual trust. With this in mind, the European Union calls upon the parties to avoid all unilateral acts that might prejudice the outcome of bilateral negotiations.

The European Union takes a keen interest in the Middle East as its neighbour. Peace and prosperity in the Middle East is in our own interest. During the Finnish presidency of the Union, both President Ahtisaari and Foreign Minister Halonen have visited the region. In numerous discussions with political leaders in the region both underlined the deep commitment of the European Union to the peace process and our determination and readiness to help to search for and sustain peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The European Union will continue its efforts, in particular through its Special Envoy, Ambassador Moratinos, to help restart negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. We also reaffirm our readiness to be fully associated with the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and to contribute to the permanent status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in accordance with the wishes of the parties.

Likewise, the European Union remains determined to help relaunch as soon as possible the multilateral track of the peace process. We hope that all regional parties will soon be ready to engage in reinvigorating the Regional Economic Development Working Group. The European Union, as the gavel-holder, attaches great importance to furthering regional economic ties. Regional cooperation is not a favour to anyone, but a mutual interest.

Recognizing the importance of a sound economy to social and political stability, the European Union will continue its considerable economic and technical assistance to the region and will seek to make progress towards its vision of a Euro-Mediterranean area of shared prosperity and free trade.

In conclusion, the European Union would like to reiterate its firm commitment to the peace process based on the principles enshrined in the relevant Security Council resolutions. The European Union has a lot to offer and is willing to play its full part in order to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Eager to ensure a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, as well as security and stability in the Middle East, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has supported the peace process from the beginning. Our support will continue, convinced as we are that peace is a strategic choice.

The Government of my country supports the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum recently signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, which defines the terms of the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum.

We would request the new Israeli Government to revive the peace process on all tracks and to respect the commitments undertaken, on the basis of which the peace process was founded at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) the principle of land for peace and the complete unconditional withdrawal from the territories occupied in the Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967. We urge Israel to abstain from its repeated attacks on the independence and sovereignty of the Lebanese territories and demand that it immediately and unconditionally withdraw from southern Lebanon and western Beka'a, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

In harmony with the common Arab position, expressed by the Council of the League of Arab States at its 101st session, that all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons should be removed from our critical region, we are interested in the efforts to make the Middle East a region free of weapons of mass destruction. We must also stress that Israel is the only State in the region that refuses to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, although it is the only one to possess such weapons. We hope that the peace process will be successful and invite Israel to accede to the Treaty and to help make the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction of all kinds.

The United Nations and its Member States have accorded considerable importance to the Middle East and have placed this item on the agenda of the General Assembly at all its sessions. At the most recent session, in particular, the General Assembly urged all parties directly concerned to consider seriously the steps required for the implementation of the proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and, as a means of promoting this objective, invited the countries concerned to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It also called upon the countries of the region that have not done so, pending the establishment of the zone, to agree to place all their nuclear activities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. The Assembly noted the importance of the ongoing bilateral Middle East peace negotiations in promoting mutual confidence. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hopes that the international community, through its member States, will succeed in achieving the ideal goal of creating a region free of weapons of mass destruction.

Despite a slight improvement in relations with the Iranian Government, the problem of Iran's occupation of the United Arab Emirates islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa has persisted, despite the bilateral contacts between those two countries since the new Government took power in Iran. We hope that Iran will adopt a new policy for dealing with the situation that has emerged in the Gulf region and that serious negotiations with the Emirates on this matter will begin, including an agreement to submit the case to the International Court of Justice if negotiations should fail. If an agreement is reached, it will undoubtedly open a new chapter in relations between Iran and the countries of the Gulf, strengthening peace and stability in the Gulf region and in the Middle East as a whole.

My country still totally condemns the 1990 Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. We continue to ask the Iraqi Government to respect all the resolutions adopted by the Security Council following the occupation of Kuwait. At the same time, we cannot forget the suffering of the Iraqi people under the economic sanctions in effect for eight years, which do not appear as if they were about to be lifted any time soon unless the basis on which they are applied should change. We also support the position of certain permanent members of the Security Council in favour of lifting some sanctions on Iraqi transactions with the outside world so that the import of food, medicine and other necessities may be possible. We further support the creation of a new system of inspection of weapons of mass destruction.

The countries of the Middle East must raise the standard of living of their peoples and ensure their position in international markets in accordance with the challenges of globalization, which has begun to govern world economic trends. For these and other reasons, the countries of my region need peace, stability and confidence so that they can devote their natural resources to the needs of their peoples. This is not impossible if the countries of the region succeed in cooperating with the international community in resolving the problems that I have mentioned.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The United States continues to support a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. We will do everything we can to assist the parties to reach a negotiated agreement which will resolve their differences.

The situation in the Middle East has changed significantly since the last session of the General Assembly. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum sets out a timetable for future progress in the peace process.

Progress has already been made. The safe passage route between Gaza and the West Bank is operating. The Gaza sea port has been approved. Further redeployments have been carried out. Additional prisoners have been released, and the parties have begun talks on a framework agreement for permanent status.

Despite these positive developments in the peace process, negotiations on the text of a draft resolution supporting the process were unsuccessful. My Government regrets that the General Assembly has thus been deprived of the opportunity to take official notice of the progress already made and express its support and encouragement as this historic attempt to resolve the long-standing Arab-Israeli dispute through peaceful negotiations continues.

My Government would like to express its gratitude to the sponsors of the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process, the Russian Federation and Norway, for their tireless and dedicated efforts to reach agreement on a text.

The draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" (A/54/L.41), like so many of the other resolutions dealing with the Arab-Israeli dispute, seeks to interject the General Assembly into negotiations. Syria and Israel have both publicly supported the principle of a negotiating process to resolve their differences, and draft resolutions such as this do not contribute to that goal. The United States will abstain in the voting on the draft resolution on Jerusalem, consistent with our belief that the future of Jerusalem should be decided through permanent status negotiations.

Mr. Jasmi (Malaysia): In May this year the five-year period for a final settlement under the Oslo accords lapsed, with peace still not yet in sight. The question of Palestine, which is the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, has yet to reach its final and peaceful settlement. There was a deadlock in the peace process as the implementation of the Wye River agreement was unilaterally suspended by former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. The little progress made with regard to the implementation of the agreements negotiated dampened the prospects of an early resolution of the Palestinian issue and prolonged the agony of the people living under Israeli occupation in the occupied territories. A just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is the only way towards the attainment of lasting peace in the region.

Regrettably, there has not been much progress either in the other, related issues in the Middle East. My delegation is deeply concerned that the peace talks between Syria and Israel, suspended in 1996, have not been resumed since. There should be an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan Heights, as called for by Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 338 (1973). The renewal by the Security Council earlier this month of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) reminds us of the still tense situation between the two countries. My delegation is deeply concerned that while there are no serious incidents, the situation remains dangerous and potentially volatile. My delegation shares the observation the Secretary-General makes in his report, that

> "Despite the present quiet in the Israeli-Syrian sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached." (*S/1999/1175, para. 10*)

We call on the parties concerned to revive the stalled peace process to bring about a comprehensive peace settlement as soon as possible. The continued occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel constitutes another major stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

There has been no change in the situation between Lebanon and Israel. After 20 years, Israel's occupation forces still remain in south Lebanon, in spite of Security Council resolutions calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. Reports from Security Council field operations regarding recent clashes between the Israeli Defence Forces and armed elements, which have resulted in civilian injuries and damage to property in the area, attest to the volatile security situation there. We call on the new Israeli Government to make good its intention to withdraw its forces from Lebanon as soon as possible.

There are, however, some glimmers of hope that some progress could be made to further the peace process. The initial steps taken in the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements and the time-frame agreed on to achieve final settlement, by September 2000, bring with them a cautious optimism that the peace process is back on track. The issues that remain to be resolved are difficult and sensitive, and there may be some who would like to derail the process. My delegation calls on all parties concerned to refrain from activities which prejudice the outcome of the final status

negotiations and from any activity contrary to international laws, including settlement activities. We are particularly concerned about the negative impact of the settlements issue on the progress of the negotiations at this critical juncture.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and to wish him well in continuing the good work of coordinating United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people. We also wish to commend the men and women who have served well with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and UNDOF for their courageous work in a difficult and often dangerous environment, risking life and limb for the cause of international peace and security.

Malaysia is of the firm conviction that security for all countries in the Middle East can be assured only through the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. This should be based on the principle of the exchange of land for peace and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

As stated yesterday by the Secretary-General in his message on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, "The peace process has now entered a phase that is at once its most promising and its most difficult." The international community must not miss this window of opportunity to finally bring about peace and stability in the Middle East region and to allow the people there to begin the new millennium in an environment of peace and stability.

Mr. Abdullahi (Nigeria): I wish to express the gratitude of the Nigerian delegation to the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in the Middle East. The crisis in that area has been the most protracted and difficult conflict facing the international community for a very long time. Happily, significant progress has been recorded in this decade. The various initiatives and efforts, such as the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the 1991 Oslo accord, the 1998 Wye River Memorandum and other agreements, manifestly show that when there is political will and commitment on the part of all the parties, significant steps toward lasting peace are possible.

In spite of intermittent setbacks in the peace process, we are encouraged by the willingness and, indeed, the determination of some of the parties to remain engaged in dialogue, discussion and negotiations. In this connection, we welcome all the efforts that have been made by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to reduce tension and move towards permanent peace. The Oslo tripartite summit early this month has certainly given a fresh impetus to this process.

We are only 10 months away from the destination of a long journey which began over 50 years ago. Undoubtedly, we are all anxious and eager to attain this very important goal. All members of the international community have a responsibility to support the peace process. Our duty is therefore to continuously encourage all the parties to reach an agreement that will bring peace, security and stability to that region.

The geography and the history of the region make it imperative for a peaceful resolution of the dispute between Israel and other parties. This is the surest way of ensuring that the peace accord between the Israelis and the Palestinians will have the desired effect of easing tension in that region. It is only in an atmosphere of peace and stability that economic development, and in particular trade and investment, can flourish. It is therefore essential to remind all the parties that peace is neither divisible nor can it be compartmentalized.

The Nigerian delegation believes that the time has certainly come for other parties in the region to return to the negotiating table. In this regard, Nigeria calls on all States in the region to shed the use of force as a means of resolving disputes. Furthermore, we strongly urge all the parties to deploy their best efforts towards peace so that at the beginning of the new millennium, the peoples of a region that has not known peace for a long time can at last put the hostilities and bitterness of the past behind them.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Egypt, who will introduce draft resolutions A/54/L.40 and A/54/L.41.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt)(*spoke in Arabic*): In my statement before the General Assembly yesterday, I presented the basic elements of my country's position with regard to the question of Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track in the peace process. Today, I would like to present the basic elements of

Egypt's position with regard to the Middle East peace process in general and to other related topics.

If, as I mentioned yesterday, Egypt considers the question of Palestine as the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the key to the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East, it also believes that the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the area should be based on equally important elements: first, a total Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem; secondly, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza; thirdly, the establishment of mutual and equitable security measures; fourthly, the establishment of normal, neighbourly relations between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. Until a settlement including all these elements is achieved, Israel must refrain from taking any unilateral action on the ground. Here I specifically mean all settler activities that run counter to international law and United Nations resolutions or that abort the negotiations and void them of their content.

Arab participation in the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and in the subsequent steps towards in the entire peace process was based on Security Council resolution 242 (1967), as the main axis of the negotiating process in all its tracks. In this respect, I would like to recall that the peace that Egypt established with Israel more than 20 years ago was based on the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967); it has thus set a basic precedent for the achievement of a peaceful settlement between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. Therefore, our position is based on that peace and is as follows: first, there must be a total withdrawal from all territories that were occupied by force in 1967; secondly, these territories must be cleared of any Israeli settlements; thirdly, mutual security measures with the agreement of both parties must be established; and fourthly, normal relations between the two States concerned must be established. These are the foundations that constitute the so-called land for peace formula, which Egypt believes must be applied to the peaceful settlement between Israel and any concerned Arab party. In this regard, we would like to reiterate that Security Council resolution 242 (1967) must be implemented as an indivisible whole and not piecemeal. The claims that we hear every now and then about the application of this resolution to some tracks and not to others, to certain Arab territories and not to others, are all based on an illegality that lacks the benefit of a sound understanding of the resolution, which does not distinguish either in letter or in spirit among the territories occupied by Israel by force in 1967. Territories occupied by force should be evacuated. This is the principle enshrined in the Charter and is the principle applied by the United Nations since its inception.

In relation to the Syrian track of the peace process, and contrary to the hopes we all had when the new Government took over in Israel last July, we find that the Israeli side still resists recognition of the important progress achieved in the negotiations between Syria and Israel up to 1995 in a manner that hinders the resumption of negotiations on this track. Here I would like to reiterate our firm position in support of Syria's full right to regain its occupied territories in their entirety, which is the only way to establish peace between Syria and Israel.

With regard to the Lebanese track, Egypt reiterates its support of the Lebanese position regarding the necessity for Israel to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) fully and unconditionally. We are confident that an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and western Bekaa will represent the first step on the road to enhancing confidence, reducing tensions, achieving more stability and even establishing peace between Lebanon and Israel within the framework of a comprehensive peace in the region.

I should like here to speak of Egypt's vision of a comprehensive peace in the region, which involves the element of security. Egypt believes that the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the genuine basis for comprehensive security in the interest of all the parties in the region. It should be clear that the security we seek in the Middle East is the security of all parties, not the security of one party or the other at the expense of the security of the rest. Comprehensive security is the only genuine equivalent of comprehensive peace.

Proceeding from this premise, Egypt continues to call for the removal of all nuclear weapons from the Middle East. Since 1990, within the framework of the initiative of President Mubarak, we have called for the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. In this context, may I recall the continued Israeli refusal to take any measures or actions that would enhance confidence in the area of inspection of its nuclear facilities, another element that adds to political and even military tension in a region that already suffers from a high degree of tension and lack of confidence.

The link between the establishment of a comprehensive, just and durable peace, on the one hand, and the promotion of equitable regional cooperation in the interest of all States of the region, on the other, is an organic link that cannot be severed. Egypt relates all movement on the bilateral negotiating tracks to the possibility of progress in realizing regional cooperation in all its aspects and on all its tracks.

A concept of peace in the Middle East is a whole that cannot be fragmented, and there is no doubt that a relaxation of tensions on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks would enhance the opportunity for more activity by all parties in the Middle East. Therefore, we hope that the peace process will witness genuine positive developments that could lead to regional cooperation based on the genuine requirements of the States of the region within common areas of interest.

The establishment of peace in the Middle East requires the coordination of all efforts by all parties in the region and by peace-loving States from other regions. In this connection, I wish to express, on behalf of Egypt, our appreciation for the positive role played by the United States, the members of the European Union and other States in the enhancement and activation of the peace process.

Egypt looks forward to an imminent and successful conclusion of the peace process that will enable all the States of the region, including the emerging State of Palestine, to realize the hopes and aspirations of their peoples for social and economic development within a framework of security, good-neighbourliness and mutual respect in a manner that provides the region with a better future and that enables it to regain its leadership role in the service of humanity.

Before concluding, I wish to introduce the two draft resolutions contained in documents A/54/L.40 and A/54/L.41, submitted under agenda item 43, on the situation in the Middle East.

Draft resolution A/54/L.40 is entitled "Jerusalem", and I am introducing it on behalf of Egypt and the other sponsors: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, the Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine. This draft resolution, like last year's, includes three preambular paragraphs and four operative paragraphs. In the first preambular paragraph, the General Assembly, having considered the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East" would recall the various resolutions adopted from 1981 until last year that stipulate the illegality and illegitimacy of all measures taken by Israel in Jerusalem.

The second preambular paragraph recalls Security Council resolution 478 (1980), in which the Security Council determined that the "Basic Law" on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel were null and void and must be rescinded forthwith and called upon all States that had established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions.

Operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution determines that the decision of Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem is illegal and therefore null and void.

Operative paragraph 2 deplores the transfer by some States of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which I mentioned a while ago.

Operative paragraph 3 calls once more on those States to abide by the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions, in conformity with their obligations to the Charter of the United Nations.

The last operative paragraph requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

I would now like to turn to the draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" (A/54/L.41), which I would like to introduce on behalf of Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine.

The third preambular paragraph recalls Security Council resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council rejected the illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan by Israel. The fourth preambular paragraph reaffirms the fundamental Charter principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and the fifth reaffirms once more the applicability of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War to the occupied Syrian Golan.

The sixth preambular paragraph states the Assembly's deep concern that Israel has not withdrawn from the Syrian Golan, which has been under occupation since 1967, and the seventh stresses the illegality of the Israeli settlement construction and activities in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The eighth preambular paragraph notes with satisfaction the convening at Madrid in 1991 of the Peace Conference on the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the formula of land for peace, which is the core of the peace process.

The last preambular paragraph expresses the Assembly's grave concern over the halt in the peace process on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and the hope that peace talks will soon resume from the point they had reached.

Operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution declares that Israel has failed so far to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Operative paragraph 2 declares also that the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and has no validity whatsoever and calls upon Israel to rescind it.

Operative paragraph 3 reaffirms the Assembly's determination that all relevant provisions of the Regulations annexed to the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War continue to apply to the Syrian territory occupied by Israel.

Operative paragraph 4 determines once more that the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan constitutes a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Operative paragraphs 5 and 6 call upon Israel to resume talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect the commitments and undertakings reached during the previous talks.

Operative paragraph 7 calls upon all the parties concerned, the co-sponsors of the peace process and the entire international community to exert all the necessary efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process and its success.

The last operative paragraph requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

In conclusion, I would like to introduce these two draft resolutions to the General Assembly on behalf of the sponsoring States and to call on all delegations to vote in favour of them, for they reaffirm the basic principles contained in the United Nations Charter and call for the achievement of justice.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (spoke in Arabic): On the eve of the third millennium, my delegation looks forward not only to working to prepare for the advent of the twenty-first century, but also to prepare for the celebration to follow the reaching of a final solution to one of the thorniest conflicts of the twentieth century, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict, whose ramifications still hang over us.

Proceeding from a genuine Arab and Islamic spirit, the State of Kuwait will always support the constant calls by Arabs to reach a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East on the basis of internationally binding resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Based on this premise, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the following.

First, we welcome the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signed early in September last, between the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli Administration as a positive step on the right track. It should be completed by the new Israeli Administration by returning to the framework and principles adopted by the Madrid Peace Conference and the resumption of the negotiations on all tracks. This will lead to the restoration of all the legitimate rights of the Arabs and the implementation of all internationally binding resolutions in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Secondly, Kuwait is following with keen interest the delicate negotiations currently under way between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Administration concerning a final settlement. In this respect, we strongly support the call to the Israeli Administration to cease forthwith all its unilateral measures aimed at changing the demographic composition of Jerusalem, which contravene all norms of international law and internationally binding resolutions. Israel should also put an immediate end to all its illegal settlement policies, especially the appropriation of occupied land in Jerusalem.

We also call on Israel to respect the demand of the Palestinian people to preserve East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state and their right to return to their homeland in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We also reject all Israeli attempts to disseminate the idea of settling the refugees away from their homeland.

We also call on Israel to withdraw completely from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and we look forward to a final resolution of the issue on the agreed date, 21 September 2000.

Thirdly, we in Kuwait are even more deeply concerned because the negotiations on both the Syrian and Lebanese tracks have been derailed and because Israel has reneged on all the agreements reached during the most recent phase of negotiations. The only solution that can lead to a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is a complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Arab Golan Heights, to the line of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon and western Bekaa, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978).

Kuwait calls on Israel to cease its repeated acts of aggression against Lebanon and its independence — fraternal Lebanon, which we hold in high esteem. We support our brethren in Lebanon in their development efforts so that Beirut, the cultural capital of the Middle East for 1999, can regain its glory as an enlightened cultural centre.

Fourthly, Kuwait highly appreciates the role played by the co-sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, especially that of the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, as well as that of the European Union. We hope that those parties will continue to support the peace process at all levels.

Yesterday, the twentieth session of the Gulf Cooperation Council ended its work in Riyadh. The elements I have mentioned were made crystal-clear at that session. We also associate ourselves with our leaders in this respect, and we hope that next year will bring about the achievement of our peoples' aspirations to a just and comprehensive peace in the area, and that Israel will move from words to concrete and positive deeds.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.